

Message Text

SECRET

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8888

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 4211

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH GHASSEN TUENI

1. GHASSEN TUENI, LEBANESE PERMREP AT UN, AND PUBLISHER AN NAHAR, CAME TO SEE ME JULY 25 TO DISCUSS CURRENT IMPASSE. WE EXCHANGED VIEWS AT SOME LENGTH ON SYRIAN INTENTIONS AND LEBANESE RESPONSE. TUENI SAID HE THOUGHT SITUATION REQUIRED A NEW ARRANGEMENT. SYRIANS HAD LOST CONFIDENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND WOULD HAVE TO WITHDRAW FROM BEIRUT AND EVENTUALLY FROM AREAS OF CONTACT WITH CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL. IN EXCHANGE FOR THIS THEY WOULD HAVE TO GET SOME POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT THOSE CONSIDERATIONS WERE BECAUSE SYRIANS HAD NOT MADE THEIR DEMANDS CLEAR.

2. TUENI SAID SARKIS HAD ASKED HIM TO TRY TO ARRANGE DIS-
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ENGAGEMENT. HE HAD RESPONDED BY ASKING WHAT SYRIANS WERE DEMANDING FROM LEBANESE SO HE COULD KNOW LIMITS WITHIN WHICH HE HAD TO OPERATE. SARKIS SAID THERE WERE NO SYRIAN DEMANDS. TUENI HAD ASKED ABOUT LATTAKIA SUMMIT AT WHICH ASAD WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE ASKED FOR MILITARY TREATY WITH LEBANON. SARKIS SAID THEY HAD ONLY TALKED ABOUT THE SOUTH AND THE ATMOSPHERE HAD BEEN VERY POSITIVE. TUENI HAD ALSO ASKED

BOUTROS WHAT HE HAD DISCUSSED WITH SYRIANS DURING HIS VISIT TO DAMASCUS ON JULY 5. BOUTROS HAD SAID THEY HAD ONLY DISCUSSED GENERALITIES. TUENI INDICATED SOME FRUSTRATION AT THESE RESPONSES.

3. ACCORDING TO TUENI, SYRIANS WERE TELLING CHRISTIANS THAT WE HAD GIVEN THEM GREEN LIGHT IN LEBANON. I SAID THAT WAS RATHER IRONIC GIVEN SYRIAN ACCUSATIONS WE WERE BEHIND THE TROUBLES HERE. TUENI SAID WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THERE WERE SEVERAL CURRENTS OR DIRECTIONS TO SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON AND SYRIAN RIGHT HAND MIGHT NOT KNOW WHAT LEFT HAND WAS DOING.

4. I ASKED TUENI WHETHER HE BELIEVED REPORTS WE WERE HEARING THAT SYRIANS WERE ARMING FRANGIEHS, PPS AND OTHER GROUPS IN EFFORT TO CREATE COUNTERFORCE TO PHALANGE AND AHRAR. TUENI SAID HE THOUGHT THERE WAS NO QUESTION THAT SYRIANS WERE DOING SO. ONE INDICATION OF THIS WAS THAT PRICE OF ARMS WAS DROPPING ON LOCAL MARKET. HE SAID THAT A MACHINE GUN CALLED THE "500" WHICH SOLD FOR \$12,000 IN BELGIUM WAS SELLING FOR 16,000 LEBANESE POUNDS AND NOBODY SOLD THOSE THINGS AT A LOSS. ONLY A STATE COULD SUPPLY WEAPONS OF THAT SORT AT THAT PRICE. I SAID THAT IT COULD BE THE IRAQIS OR LIBYANS, AND TUENI REPLIED IT COULD BE ANY NUMBER OF PEOPLE BUT POINT WAS THAT THE ARMS WERE COMING IN AND HE SUSPECTED SYRIANS WERE AMONG THOSE ENGAGED IN SUPPLYING THEM. WEAPONS WERE ARRIVING "IN THEIR GREASE", TO USE THE SECRET

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LOCAL EXPRESSION MEANING UNUSED.

5. I ASKED SAME QUESTION OF LATER CALLER, HENRY SFEIR, A BANKER FROM KESROUAN, WHO IS MARRIED TO A MEMBER OF THE BOULOS FAMILY FROM ZGHORTA AND WHO HAD RECENTLY BEEN UP TO VISIT SULEIMAN FRANGIEH. HE SAID SYRIAN ARMING OF FRANGIEHS WAS OBVIOUS. GUARDS AT FRANGIEH HOUSE AT EHDEN WERE CARRYING BRAND NEW AND VERY FANCY KALASHNIKOVs WHICH HAD YELLOW PLASTIC MAGAZINES AND A VERY PRETTY STOCK.

6. A PERHAPS RELATED INDICATION OF SYRIAN ACTIVITY IS AN ACCOUNT GIVEN TO ME EARLIER IN DAY BY VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR, WHO HAD FRIGHTENING ENCOUNTER WITH GROUP OF MILITIA IN SHIYAH DISTRICT LAST WEEK WHEN HE LOST HIS WAY ENROUTE TO WEST BEIRUT FROM HAZMIEH. HEAVILY ARMED MEN AT ROAD BLOCK, ALL OF WHOM WERE WEARING HAFEZ AL-ASAD BUTTONS ON THEIR RIGHT POCKET, TURNED OUT TO BE MEMBERS OF PPS (SYRIAN SOCIALIST NATIONALIST PARTY). IT IS UNLIKELY THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN OPERATING ROAD BLOCK IN THAT VICINITY WITHOUT SYRIAN APPROVAL AND SUPPORT.

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EXDIS

7. TUENI THINKS WE SHOULD STEER SARKIS IN DIRECTION
OF FINDING OUT WHAT SYRIANS WANT FOR WORKING OUT AN
ARRANGEMENT. HE SUGGESTS THAT ONE STEP MIGHT BE CREATION
OF A LOCAL SECURITY COUNCIL, WHICH WOULD INCLUDE BOTH
THE SYRIANS AND UNIFIL, TO DISCUSS PRACTICAL MEASURES ON
THE GROUND. I SAID WE WERE PREPARED TO DO WHATEVER WE
COULD BUT THERE WERE TWO MAJOR UNKNOWNNS. FIRST WAS
SYRIAN INTENTIONS. WAS THERE SOMETHING THAT WOULD SATISFY
THEM AND DID THEY KNOW WHAT THEY WANTED? WERE THEY
ACTING IN ACCORDINCE WITH A REASONED PLAN OR WERE WE SIMPLY
DEALING WITH EMOTIONS AND INDISCIPLINE OF TROOPS WHO HAD BEEN
PROVOKED BEYOND ENDURANCE? SECOND QUESTION WAS INTENTIONS
OF CHRISTIAN MILITIAS. DID THEY WANT CEASE-FIRE AND DIS-
ENGAGEMENT AND WERE THEY PREPARED TO LIVE IN PEACE WITH
SYRIANS OR WERE THEY AFTER SOMETHING GREATER, SUCH AS
PARTITION OR REVOLUTION? WERE THEY PROVOKING THE SYRIANS

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DELIBERATELY? WERE THEY AMENABLE TO REASON?

8. TUENI SAID HE HAD BEEN TAKEN TO AIN AR-RUMMANEH THE DAY BEFORE BY DANY CHAMOUN AND HAD LUNCH THERE WITH THE NOTORIOUS CHAMOUNIST LEADER, ELIAS HANNUSH, POPULARLY REFERRED TO AS "HANASH" OR "THE SNAKE". HE HAD BEEN SHOCKED TO DISCOVER THAT FAR FROM BEING A FORTRESS, AIN AR-RUMMANEH WAS A COLLECTION OF HOUSES BEING DEFENDED BY THE INHABITANTS, POOR CHRISTIANS FOR THE MOST PART, WITH THEIR FAMILIES STILL LIVING WITH THEM BECAUSE THEY HAD NO PLACE TO GO. THESE PEOPLE WERE NOT GOING TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES, AND QUITE CHEERFULLY SAID THAT IT WAS BETTER TO DIE AT HOME THAN ELSEWHERE. THEIR FORTIFICATIONS CONSISTED OF HOLES IN THE WALLS OF THEIR HOUSES THROUGH WHICH THEY COULD SEE THE SYRIAN LINES ACROSS THE STREET.

9. (LENCH HAD NOT BEEN SERVED AT ONE OF THESE HUMBLE HOUSES, BUT IN THE FORMER RESIDENCE OF THE POLISH AMBASSADOR, WHO HAD EVACUATED HURRIEDLY WHEN THE PHALANGE INSTALLED 76 MILLIMETER GUN ACROSS THE STREET SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. HANASH HAD SAID SINCE TUENI WAS AN AMBASSADOR THEY FELT HE SHOULD BE ENTER-TAINED IN AN AMBASSADORIAL HOUSE, AND THEY HAD THEREFORE TAKEN HIM TO THE POLE'S WHICH THEY HAD OCCUPIED. THEY OFFERED HIM THE POLE'S CIGARS, BUT TUENI HAD DECLINED.)

10. TUENI SAID THE CHRISTIAN MILITANTS COULD PERHAPS BE BROUGHT TO ACCEPT AN ARRANGEMENT WITH THE SYRIANS BUT IT WAS GOING TO REQUIRE LEADERSHIP ON THE PART OF THE GOL. THE CHRISTIANS FELT THEIR EXISTENCE WAS IN DANGER AND THEY WERE VERY BITTER ABOUT BOTH THE ISRAELIS AND THE AMERICANS NOT HAVING HELPED THEM MORE IN THEIR HOUR OF NEED. BASHIR GEMAYEL WAS UNDER WRAPS AND THE PHALANGE WAS BEING LED
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BY SHEIKH PIERRE. AMINE GEMAYEL WHO WAS UP AT KIKFAYA AND WAS IN CONTACT WITH THE SYRIANS WAS TRYING TO BE BROADMINDED AND PHILOSOPHICAL AND WAS LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT. CHAMOUN (WHO IS AFRAID TO LEAVE HIS RESIDENCE FOR FEAR OF BEING KILLED BY THE SYRIANS) IS STILL TALKING IN VERY TOUGH TERMS. BOTH PHALANGE AND AHRAR WERE PROBABLY QUILTY OF PROVOCATIONS AGAINST THE SYRIANS. THESE WERE THE ACTS OF PROVOCATIONS AGAINST THE SYRIANS. THESE WERE THE ACTS OF DESPERATE PEOPLE. BASHIR GEMAYEL THOUGHT THAT LEBANON WAS GOING TO BE ANOTHER ANGOLA AND THAT HE WOULD BE ITS SAVIOUR COMING DOWN OUT OF THE MOUNTAINS AFTER A TEN YEARS WAR TO RESTORE ORDER AND SAVE THE PROPLE.

11. COMMENT. ABOVE IS ATTEMPT AT PRECIS OF LONG AND INVOLVED CONVERSATION, DETAILS OF WHICH ARE BEGINNING TO ESCAPE ME AFTER EXPOSURE TO THREE STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS

CONVERSATIONS IN THE SAME DAY. I AM PARTICULARLY CONCERNED,
HOWEVER, BY WHAT TUENI AND SFEIR HAD TO SAY ABOUT SYRIANS
ARMING OPPONENTS OF PHALANGE. AS TUENI SAID, IF SYRIANS
RESORT TO THIS TACTIC IN AN EFFORT TO ISOLATE THE PHALANGE
AND AHRAR, THEY ARE SIMPLY GOING TO DRIVE PEOPLE INTO THE
ARMS OF THE GEMAYELS AND CHAMOUNS AND ARE GOING TO BRING
US BACK TO 1975. PIERRE GEMAYEL, IN HIS DAILY UTTERANCE OF
JULY 24, SAID THAT WAS WHERE WE WERE HEADING. TUENI THINKS
HE IS RIGHT.
PARKER

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